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CHEAP REPOSITORY. 28

SUNDAY READING.

EXPLANATION
OF THE
NATURE OF BAPTISM; K

DESIGNED ESPECIALLY
for all those Parents, who are about to bring a
Child to be baptized.



Sold by J. MARSHALL,
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EXPLANATION, &c.

THE Sacrament of Baptism, like that of the Lord's Supper, was appointed by Jesus Christ himself, and, no doubt, for the wisest purposes. It is a means whereby we may acquire no small insight into the nature of the whole Christian Religion. Unhappily, however, there is a remarkable degree of carelessness and ignorance about this subject prevailing among us, insomuch, that if some pains are not taken to represent this important matter aright to our countrymen in general, and to all parents in particular, we seem in danger of losing all the benefit which was intended to be conveyed to us by this institution of Christ. It is true, the form of Baptism is still continued among us. Parents appear, almost with one consent, to bring their children to be baptized; but for what purpose do they bring them? Is it because they really wish to pledge their children, and to pledge themselves afresh, to fight under the banners of Christ? Oh, no; for there are many who hardly once think of Christ in the matter. I appeal to the common observation of my Readers, whether the day of baptizing a child is not by many parents made to be little else than a day of extraordinary feasting, a day of vanity and ostentation, a day at least of mere worldly joy, of which, when the Clergyman has done his office, not a word is to be heard of that "Kingdom of Heaven" whereof the child is now said to be a "partaker," nor

of those holy ends for the sake of which Baptism was appointed by Jesus Christ.

Godfathers and godmothers also have learnt, as well as parents, to be very inconsiderate about this sacred ordinance. They promise, indeed, in the face of God and of the Church, "to renounce," in the child's name, "this wicked world, with all the sinful lusts of the flesh," and they also are understood expressly to undertake that the child shall be taught not only "the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments," but also "all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe for his soul's health;" and yet the most of them have no sooner made this vow than they think they have done with it; they reflect not whether the parent be a person who is likely to pay that attention to the child's soul for which they have been engaging, nor do they ever afterwards bestow a single thought on the child's religious education themselves.

Some there are, indeed, who do not act quite so absurdly about Baptism, nor think quite so lightly of it as many others, and yet are far from turning it to a truly religious use: they are aware, in part, of the profanation of it which is so common, but they have not the courage to differ from the general custom. They dare not refuse, for instance, to stand Godfather or Godmother whensoever some one expects or requests it of them. It is a bad custom, they allow, but since it is a custom they must comply with it. Ah, how little do they reflect, that in that very vow which in the child's name they are about to take, there is contained a promise "to renounce the world;" in which promise the Renunciation of its sinful customs is no doubt included; and I therefore ask such persons, whether

the custom of undertaking lightly the duty of God-fathers and Godmothers, is not one of those sinful customs, which the very ceremony of Baptism pledges them to renounce.

In short, then it must be acknowledged, that Baptism is on all sides neglected and profaned, and that it is become now little else than a convenient ceremony, by which people bestow a name upon their children.

But is this all that was intended by it? It surely needs no argument to prove, that it was never meant by the Founder of it to serve merely as a national ceremony by which we were to register ages, or to give names to our children. It cannot be, that a Sacrament ordained by him who died for us, enjoined upon his Disciples nearly in his last words, and emphatically urged upon us in those remarkable expressions, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,"—I say, it cannot be that a Sacrament thus solemnly appointed can deserve to be lightly treated. Depend upon it, it cannot be made light of without affronting Him who is the founder of it. It cannot be made light of without making light of Christ; without making light of Him, who is the Hope of fallen man, and the only Saviour of our souls.

Let us then proceed reverently to enquire what is the true meaning and nature of it.

And here I would first remark, that long before Baptism was appointed there prevailed among the Jews the ceremony of circumcision, which had nearly the same use and design. Abraham was the first person on whom circumcision was enjoined. Abraham was called by the Divine goodness from a state of ignorance and idolatry, he was blessed all

with many great and glorious promises; he was made the Father of the faithful, and was himself adopted into the family of God; in token whereof circumcision was required of him as a sign, the same thing being required also of his children the Jews, who became the peculiar people of God: not that the mere sign or ceremony could bring any one into God's favor, for the apostle tells the Jews, that if they did not also "keep the Law verily their circumcision was made uncircumcision." And again it is said, "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." The being "a new creature" was therefore the great point: and circumcision seems to have been intended to represent to men in those early ages, that new and holy state into which they must be brought in order to their being introduced into the favor of God; uncircumcision representing on the other hand that sinful condition in which we are born, and in which we all naturally are, according to that expression of the apostle, "And you who were *dead in your sins*, and in the *uncircumcision* of your flesh, yet now hath he reconciled."

Having thus made it appear what circumcision meant of old, let us next shew from the same word of God what Baptism signifies now.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night in order to enquire (as it seems) into the nature of that new Religion of which he had heard, Jesus says to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, not understanding what was spoken, our Saviour declares again, "Except a

man be born of *Water* and of the *Spirit* he cannot see the kingdom of God." What is it to be born of *Water* and of the *Spirit*? The answer I think will be found easy, especially if we take advantage of the information given us in other parts of Scripture. *Water*, we there find, is the sign ordered to be used in Baptism on account of it's cleansing whatever is dirty or defiled; the Holy Spirit however is the thing signified by the *Water*; for as it is the business of water to cleanse the defilement of the body, so it is the office of the Holy Spirit to cleanse the corruption of the heart of man. The meaning, therefore, of our Saviour's speech to Nicodemus seems to be as follows, "Except a man be renewed, or born again, and not by the outward Baptism of water only, but also by the effectual inward Baptism, or Purification, of the Holy Spirit—" Except a man be" thus "born," both of *Water* and of the *Spirit*" he cannot see (that is, he cannot rightly understand, nor is he qualified to enter into) the kingdom of God." Blessed," says our Savior, "are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is our hearts then, and not our bodies only, that must be baptized and purified. We are naturally corrupt, indisposed to serve God, and to obey his Will and Commandments. "We are all," says Scripture, "gone out of the way." "Behold," says David, "I was born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." "And you," says the apostle, "hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world—and were by nature the children of wrath even as others." We are therefore exhorted not to be conformed to this present world, but

to be transformed in the renewing of our minds." And the Scripture accordingly speaks of true Christians as "being cleansed by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," and of their being "washed, and cleansed, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The necessity then of this death unto Sin and new Birth unto Righteousness is plain and evident; for how can an unholy creature obtain the favor of a holy God, and become fitted for a holy heaven, without undergoing this change; so just, so rational is that saying of our Saviour, "Ye must be born again."

There are many other passages of Scripture which equally shew that to be a Christian is to undergo a great change in the natural disposition of our minds, and also that Baptism is intended to set forth to us this change. "As many of you," says St. Paul, "as have been *baptized* into Christ have put on Christ;" that is, ye have put on the same dispositions that were in your Savior, such as his humility, meekness, love to God and man, devotion, heavenly mindedness; and again, "for we are buried by *Baptism* into His death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk *in newness of life*." When Paul himself first became a Christian, Ananias said to him, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." Ananias does not merely say "Arise and be baptized." No, these words are introductory to the words that follow. And so is it in our case. "Wash away thy sins," is an addition which we also must make to our form of baptism. Nay, I will venture to remark, that Bap-

tism without this is not only useless, but it is even worse than useless. It does but aggravate our guilt; just as in the case of any other promise, he who promises but does not perform, not only makes his promise void, but is even in a worse case than if he had never made any promise at all.

The blessings of the Gospel, it is true, are, on the part of God, conveyed over to us in Baptism, but they are conveyed over to us only on the supposition, that we also on our side repent earnestly of our sins, have faith in Christ, become regenerate, or born again, and walk in newness of life. If all these things are left undone, and are forgotten by us, our Baptism is then like an agreement as yet unfulfilled. It is like a contract, or bargain, which has been made but which one of the parties has afterwards rendered void, through his having neglected to fulfil something that he promised in the very body of the deed. The other party is therefore left loose of course. For let not the Reader suppose that there is any charm in Baptism, and that on the saying over of certain words by a regular priest the gates of Heaven fly open to him, his heart being now renewed and made regenerate of course. Let not any one, I say, presume to stake his salvation on the truth of so absurd a supposition as this. A person is admitted, I grant, at the time of Baptism into the Church of Christ, but it is only into the visible Church; for an outward form can only admit into the outward church; and it is also in the way of charity supposed (according to the form now in use in the church of England) that the baptised person both does and will fulfil his part, so as to avail himself of the Christian Privileges held out to him.

Let us then beware of this as well as every other error, and as the Jews were continually warned by Christ and his apostles not to trust in the form of Circumcision, but to remember the thing signified, let us take warning not to trust in the form of Baptism, but to remember what Baptism signifies; for "he is not a Jew," says the apostle, "who is not outwardly;" and in like manner he is not a Christian who is not outwardly, "neither is Circumcision" (nor Baptism neither) "that which is outward in the flesh, but it is that of the heart and of the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of man but of God."

It is proper that something should here be added, concerning the particular expressions which our Saviour used when he appointed this ordinance of Baptism. When he had now finished his work, when he had died for our sins on the Cross, and had also risen again, and was about to ascend into Heaven, "Go ye," (said he to his disciples) "into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." "Go ye, and baptize them in the name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST."

In the same sacred names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (or Spirit) all Christians are now baptized. Let us therefore close the present subject, by endeavouring to explain in an easy and familiar manner, what it is that a true Christian, who is baptized, may be supposed to mean by each of these three striking expressions.

To be baptized into these three sacred names, may be considered then as saying, in the first place, I believe in God, the Father Almighty, who made the world and who now governs the world, and orders all things by his continual providence. It is to say, I

believe in that God of whom the Scriptures speak and not in those false Gods which vain men have imagined to themselves, whether they be Gods of wood and stone, or Gods whom their own reason hath set up in opposition to the one true and only God of the Scriptures.—It is to say, secondly—I believe also in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, and who for us men and our salvation came down from Heaven, who was crucified, dead and buried, and who on the third day rose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven. I renounce, therefore, the vain hope of being my own Savior; I own my guilt and unworthiness. I trust in the merits of my Savior's death, and in his power, to save that immortal soul which I have committed to him.—It is to say thirdly—I believe also in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the miracles which he wrought in the days of the Apostles, whereby he testified of Jesus Christ. I believe in him also as my Sanctifier; I depend on his help for that change in my corrupt nature of which I feel the need, and while I am striving earnestly against my sins, I implore the grace of this Holy Spirit, without which I know that I can do nothing. It is to say also, that I believe in him as my Comforter. I draw my best consolations not from the world, nor from the ordinary satisfactions of this life, still less from the indulgence of my pride or of my passions; but my highest comfort springs from those Holy Doctrines of the Gospel which the Divine Spirit has, I trust, impressed on my heart; and from that humble persuasion which he hath given me, that, for the sake of Jesus Christ, God ever now admits me into his favor, and will hereafter receive me into his glory.

Such is the true meaning of our being baptized

to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy
 host. It is to renounce the Devil and all his
 works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,
 and all the sinful lusts of the flesh, so as no longer
 to follow nor be led by them. It is to chuse instead
 of these, and as it were in defiance of them, and in
 direct opposition to them, that Father, Son, and
 Holy Spirit which have been spoken of. It is to
 profess to live all our days in this faith, persevering
 in it through all the changes and chances of this
 mortal life, in spite of all the revolutions which
 may happen in the faith of our own country or in
 that of surrounding nations. It is to determine to
 hold fast this faith into whatsoever new place we go,
 and among whatsoever company we may chance to
 dwell, amidst the scoff of infidels, amidst the gain-
 saying of heretics, amidst all the discouragements
 that may rise up against it in the world, amidst the
 evil example of degenerate and corrupt Christians,
 and amidst the united enmity and opposition of all
 wicked men. And lastly, to take on ourselves the
 Christian name in Baptism is to profess that in this
 faith having lived, in this faith we trust we shall not
 be afraid to die, since we are well persuaded, that
 we shall not be ashamed of having confessed this
 faith on the great judgment day.

HAVING spoken hitherto of Baptism in general, I
 now mean to make the following

*Address to those Parents who are about to bring a
 Child to be baptized.*

A general question might indeed be asked—"But
 why should infants be baptized at all? Why should
 they be made to promise that which, on account

of their tender age, they cannot perform." To objection the Church of England gives the following answer.—"Because the children promise, by means of their sureties, which promise, when they come to age, they themselves are bound to perform." Now, I cannot help here remarking, that although the Godfathers and Godmothers may be the persons in this place alluded to, yet Parents also must necessarily be considered as sureties, and even principal sureties for the religious education of the children; for, not to mention the duty that arises from the very relationship between parent and child, is it not the parents who bring the child to be baptized? Does it not depend on the parents' will whether the child shall be baptized or not? The Baptism of the child being then the parents' act, the parents certainly must be considered as approving the Baptismal vow, and as approving it both with respect to their children and themselves also.

You then that are parents, and that are about to bring a child to be baptized, ask yourselves such questions as the following.—First, am I serious what I am doing? Baptism you have just seen is a solemn thing. It is not that light matter which some people make of it. Indeed, the manner in which parents are used to bring their children to be baptized, may serve as a test or proof by which we may try the reality of their whole religion. They who treat Christian Baptism lightly, we may depend upon it, are altogether light and giddy people; nor is it all to be light and giddy in a case of this sort, is to be profane and wicked also.

There is something indeed particularly aggravated in the guilt of those parents who come in

ling spirit to attend their child's Baptism. When
 the mother has just escaped from the pains and
 trials of child-birth; when the father has had the
 life of his beloved wife preserved to him, and when
 they both are made the happy parents of a living
 infant, then is the time for coming and offering up
 to God, who is their deliverer, and in the name of
 Christ, who is their Saviour, their delicate and
 tender offspring. Is this then the time for light and
 merry mirth? or for luxury, and vanity, and ostenta-
 tion? or for giving way to the evil customs of an
 unthinking world? and, above all, is this a time
 for profaning one of the most sacred ordinances of
 Christ? No; it is the time rather for the parents
 to think of their sins, and to examine into all the
 errors of their own past life. And as the right
 education of their new-born infant will now be-
 come the object of their thought, it ought certainly
 to occur to them, and to impress itself very strongly
 on their mind, that an immortal Being is now com-
 mitted to their care, a Being whose soul is likely to
 be saved or lost, according as it receives from them
 good or a bad education, influence, and example.
 To have brought an immortal Being into the world
 to every considerate mind, in itself no light
 matter; and for the parents to be the means not
 of saving, but of damning the child to which they
 have given birth, is a thought too horrible to be
 borne. Many, therefore, who neglect their own
 souls cannot endure the idea of neglecting the souls
 of their children, and they are for doing some-
 thing at least towards, what they call, the right
 education of their offspring: but let all parents re-
 member that if they are light and profane, instead
 of being serious and devout in presenting their child

to God in Baptism, the child is then introduced into life by an act which amounts to a solemn mockery of God. And, alas, is there not then too much reason to fear lest (to borrow some words of the Church of England Service) "*the child should lead the remainder of his life; but too truly, according to this beginning.*"

But now to be more particular. First, then, before the time of Baptism comes; be sure that you offer up to God in secret the most fervent prayer on the behalf of your infant. What is Baptism? It is a Sacrament appointed by Christ, in order to remind us that the natural hearts both of parents and children need to be baptized or cleansed by God's Holy Spirit; and how is this gift of the Holy Spirit to be obtained? By Prayer. For God hath said "He will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it." As then by Prayer you are to seek this gift for yourself, so are you to seek it for your children also. Pray then, I say, that God will give to your child "that thing which by nature he cannot have; that He will endow him not only with kind and amiable tempers, but also with the still greater gift of his heavenly grace. Pray that he may not only be respectable, so as to do credit to his family in the eyes of men, but that he may have the fear of God also in his heart. Pray that he may be established in the faith of Christ, and that he may be one of those who shall one day fight manfully under Christ's banners against Sin, the World, and the Devil, and who shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified in the midst of a proud, a careless and a wicked world.

Let me remark next, in respect to Godfathers and Godmothers, that it will be your endeavour if you

at all impressed with the important nature of baptism, to chuse them from among the most religious persons of your acquaintance, and not merely among those who may be most likely to help forward your child in his worldly interest; for, in case of this sort, you must cast aside the principle of worldly policy, and you may also have to act against the rules of civility and common custom. It is probable, indeed, if you have hitherto been a thoughtless, irreligious person, that your religious friends, if you have any, will be very shy of standing Godfathers or Godmothers to your children. In order, then, to take away their objections, explain to them how seriously you now intend to bring up your offspring. Assure them, that you account baptism a very solemn thing, that you wish them to undertake for the religious education of your child on serious principles, and also that you shall be glad to take advice from them from time to time on this subject.

In the next place, *on the day of Baptism*, be careful to avoid all extravagant feasting and shew, as well as levity. Do not prepare a vast expensive dinner, but a decent and moderate meal, and beware of inviting a croud of irreligious people to be your guests. Do not dress out the little infant in expensive finery, but remember that you are about to dedicate him to one, who, when he gave a feast to his followers, was pleased to offer them nothing but a few fishes and barley bread, who had not him a house where to lay his head, and who, when he was nearly of the age of your child, was laid in a manger.

And *when the day of Baptism is over*, begin immediately to prepare for the good education of

your child, by taking all those steps which become you. If there is any thing in your character and conduct which will reflect blame on you in the eyes of your offspring, and thus lessen the reverence for you, endeavour to correct all such things now. Are there any wrong habits which you are living in, be sure to change them now. Have you any friends, whose principles are such as make them dangerous companions for your child, part then from all such friends now, and begin immediately to form such connections, and to establish such religious customs in your family, as may be of serious use to your children.

Above all, lastly, take this occasion of examining whether you have ever yet fulfilled your oath or vow in Baptism; for, if you have not, it is in vain to expect that you will do your duty religiously to your children. Examine, then, whether the great end of Baptism has been fulfilled in you; whether you have ever repented of your sins, have turned to God, have learnt to deny the sinful inclinations of your heart, have refused to follow the evil customs of the world, and have become holy, as your profession of Christianity requires you to be. Examine in short, whether you have got a Christian name only, or a Christian nature also. If you cannot answer these questions satisfactorily, do not turn away from the subject altogether, but rather take the opportunity which the affecting circumstance of a child's birth affords you of considering over your own ways; and let the season of your child being born into a new world, be the season of your own death unto sin, and new birth unto righteousness.

THE END.

